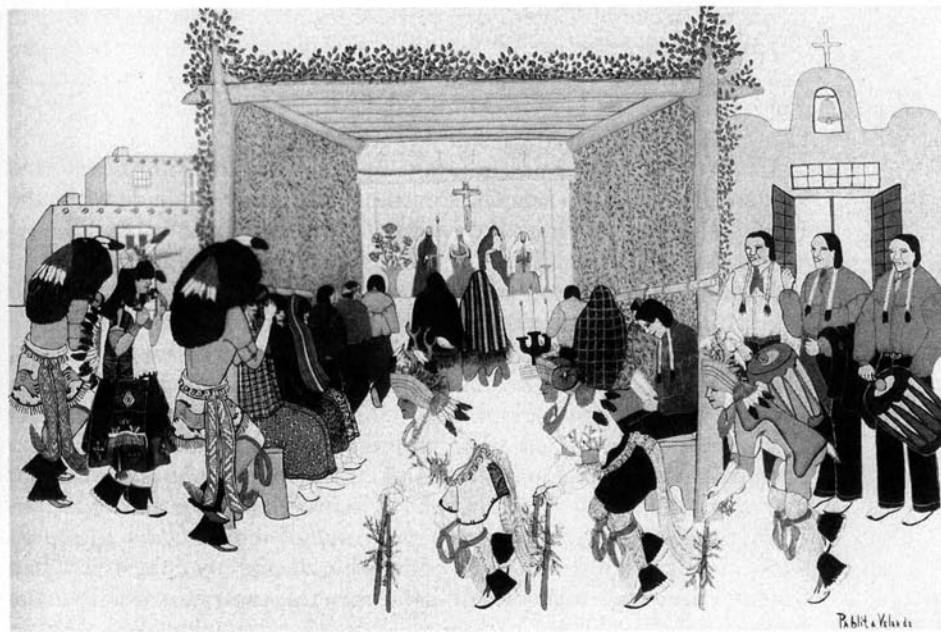


Gender, Race, and Modernism after the Second World War

The emergence of an American avant-garde, along with a body of formalist criticism centered in the writings of Clement Greenberg and his followers, dominates traditional art historical accounts of the period after the Second World War. Nevertheless, abstract and figurative art coexisted despite the increasing critical and curatorial attention directed toward the Abstract Expressionists and their successors after 1948. The ways that the meanings of this Modernist art have been produced, reinforced, and challenged can be observed in the shifting relationship of women's art to broader social formulations and mainstream art during this period. The origins of these shifts lie in the 1930s, the period when American artists began self-consciously to formulate a social role for the visual arts.

During the Depression, American artists under government patronage became an integral part of the workforce and evolved a socially conscious visual language. Working outside the dealer/critic/museum system, male and female artists identified themselves with the labor force. Federal arts projects, like the Works Progress (later Projects) Administration (WPA, 1934–39), supported women's struggles for professional recognition; a 1935 survey of professional and technical workers on relief revealed that among artists receiving aid, approximately forty-one percent were women. The federal section of Fine Arts, a non-relief program which funded murals for public buildings, awarded its commissions on the basis of anonymous competitions in which artists submitted unsigned sketches. Louise Nevelson, Lee Krasner, Isabel Bishop, and Alice Neel were first supported by such programs. WPA patronage also extended to artists of color. During the 1930s, the sculptor Augusta Savage (who was one of the few visual artists involved in the previous decade's cultural movement known as The Harlem Renaissance, and one of the most influential artists working in New York's Harlem) lobbied the WPA to include African-American artists in its programs. Later, she became an instructor at the WPA-supported Harlem Community Art Center and a major force in the training of younger African-American artists.

Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society*
(London: Thames and Hudson, 1990)



189 Pablita Velarde *Animal Dance* 1939–45

In 1939, Pueblo painter Pablita Velarde was commissioned by the WPA to paint the customs and ceremonies of the Pueblo people in 84 paintings for the Bandelier National Monument, just outside Santa Fe, New Mexico. The iconography of the paintings that resulted developed from library research and interviews with the elders. Velarde went on to become the most prominent Indian woman easel painter in North America during the 1950s, but by the time she won the Grand Purchase Award at the Philbrook Art Center in 1953, post-war American painting had become synonymous with Abstract Expressionism in the eyes of critics and museums.

Despite such achievements, women of color often faced formidable political and social barriers. Mine Okubo, Elizabeth Catlett, and Lois Mailou Jones were among a larger group of artists who, for a variety of reasons, were displaced from their communities of origin. Okubo (1912–2001), who trained at the University of California in Berkeley and exhibited at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1940, was incarcerated two years later along with over 100,000 persons of

Japanese ancestry. While living in relocation centers at Tanforan and Topaz, she executed many paintings and drawings in charcoal, pen and ink, gouache and watercolor that forcefully express the effects of dislocation on the lives of America's Japanese communities and their families.

Catlett's (b. 1915) work has roots in the social consciousness of the Harlem Renaissance and Depression eras (she studied with the Regionalist painter Grant Wood at the University of Iowa) and the art of the Mexican muralists. Upon receiving a fellowship in 1945 to execute a series of prints on the lives of black women, she traveled to Mexico and participated in the *Taller de Gráfica Popular*, a collective print workshop concerned with the social function of art. In Mexico, Catlett also studied with the sculptor Francisco Zuniga. During the 1960s, when she was harassed by the House Un-American Activities Committee for her left-wing political beliefs, Catlett decided to become a Mexican citizen. Not until 1971, when the Studio Museum in Harlem organized a retrospective of her work, was she allowed to re-enter the United States. Catlett was one of a significant group of American artists and writers of color who, at least since the 1920s, had sought an escape from racism and restricted professional and social opportunities by removing themselves to other countries. Lois Mailou Jones (1905-98), on the other hand, voluntarily chose to live as an expatriate for extended periods of time rather than suffer racism at home, and to connect more intensely with the artistic traditions of France and, later, Haiti.

The New Deal's non-discriminatory policies, and the number of women active professionally in the arts, form only part of a larger picture. A backlash against women wage earners during the 1930s took a devastating toll. Caroline Bird has dated the origin of the move to return women from work back into the home to the 1930s, rather than after the Second World War, as is commonly believed, and labor statistics confirm her contention. Mass-market publications, as well as statistics compiled during the 1930s, point to the contradictions between New Deal policies, with Roosevelt as President and Frances Perkins, the first woman in the U.S. Cabinet, as Secretary of Labor, and extensive public hostility toward working women. On the cultural front, at the same time that Marion Greenwood, Minna Citron, Doris Lee, Lucienne Bloch, Neel, Bishop, Nevelson, Krasner, and others were participating in mural projects which explored the social realities of unemployment and life under the Depression, Hollywood was producing the first of a series of films popularly known as "weepies."

Addressed to a female audience, their female protagonists confronted issues or problems specified as "female"—domestic life, the family, maternity, self-sacrifice, and romance.

Women artists active in public arts programs during the 1930s found themselves on a less secure footing in the next decade as government patronage gave way to private art galleries, and as social ideologies promoted sexual difference as cause for removing women from productive labor. In the early 1940s, before the consolidation of Abstract Expressionism, artists in New York worked in styles ranging from Social Realism to Geometric Abstraction. Realists like Isabel Bishop (1902-88) sought to connect the grand manner of classical tradition and Renaissance composition with contemporary urban subjects. Other painters, including John Graham, Stuart Davis, Irene Rice Pereira (1902-71), and Balcomb Greene, continued to espouse the principles of Geometric Abstraction. Still others, influenced by the presence of many Surrealist artists during the War, moved to a biomorphic abstraction responsive to the Surrealist belief that automatism released the rich imagery of the unconscious mind.

The Museum of Modern Art, New York, today perceived as the major cultural institution enshrining Modernist art, in fact came to support the new painting only gradually. The consolidation of Abstract Expressionism as the dominant practice in American modern art pushed to the margins not only women moving toward artistic maturity in other "modern" styles during the 1940s, but also many women professionally active in what would come to be seen as "conservative" and "outmoded" figurative styles. The paintings of women whose careers developed within Abstract Expressionism are not representative of the wide range of work actually executed by women at this time. Nor did these women form a unified "group." Nevertheless, their engagement with this and other issues that defined Modernist art after the Second World War brought them into direct confrontation with artistic and social practices that shaped many women's relationships to mainstream art after the War.

Explanations for why so few women attempted to align themselves with Abstract Expressionism during its early years must be sought in the confluence of historical, artistic, and ideological forces in American modernism. Lee Krasner's career during the 1940s and 1950s, for example, points up the precarious place of the feminine within the rhetoric and institutions of Abstract Expressionism. Krasner was involved in the search by New York painters for a synthesis of abstract form and psychological content from the beginning. She trained first

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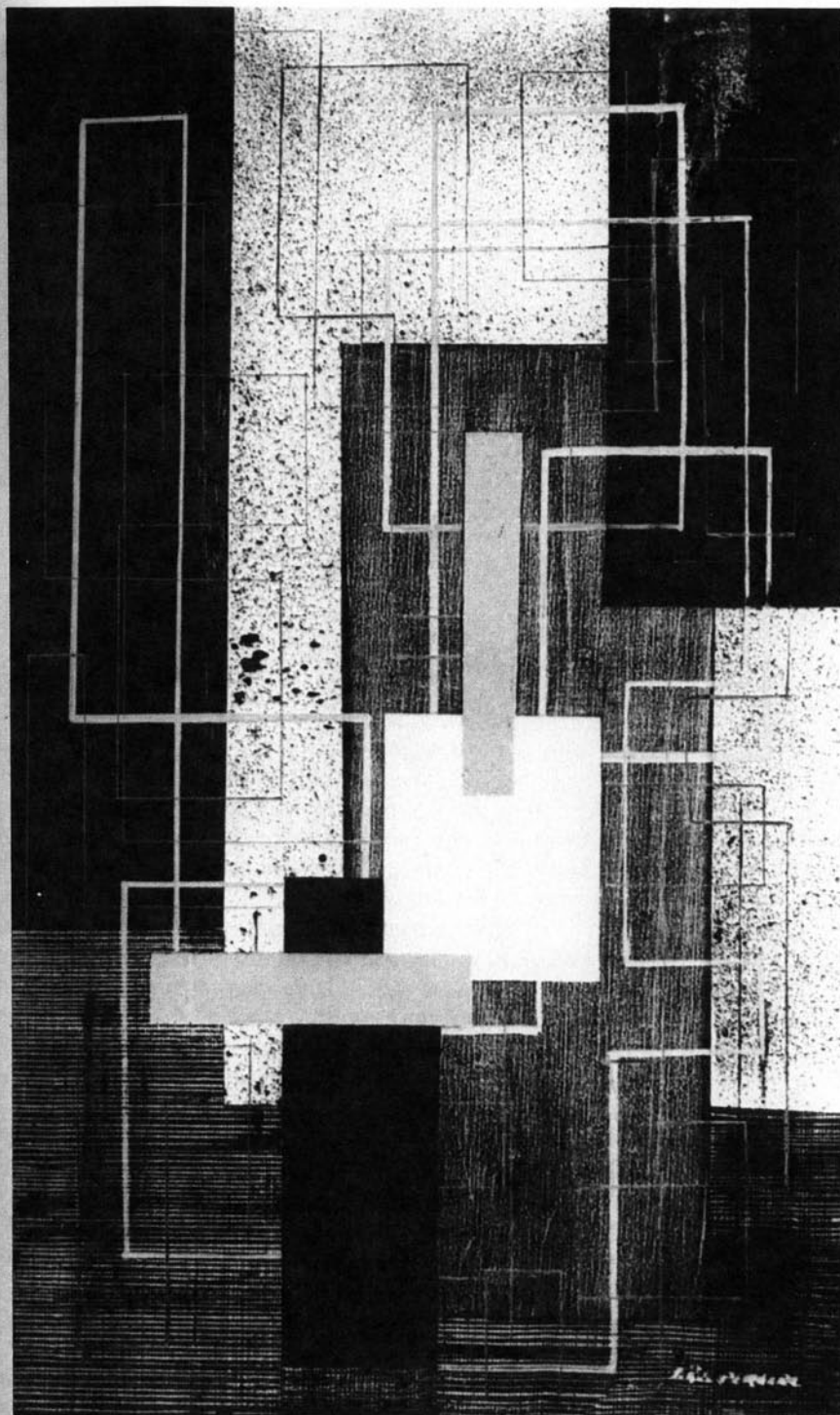
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190 Isabel Bishop *Virgil and Dante in Union Square* 1932

at the Women's Art School of Cooper Union and at the National Academy of Design. After meeting Jackson Pollock in 1941, she gave up working from nature and turned to automatism. Her gradual emergence as an abstract painter occurred in the context of an intensely personal struggle to define herself as an artist, and to establish her artistic difference from Pollock, whom she married in 1945.

The critical language of Abstract Expressionism that developed alongside Pollock's drip paintings of the late 1940s isolated and celebrated certain features—notable among them scale, action, and energy—using terms that became, as art historian T.J. Clark noted, part of an “informing metaphors of masculinity.” The gendered language that opposed an art of heroic individual struggle to the weakened (i.e., “feminized”) culture of postwar Europe positioned women outside an emerging model of subjectivity understood in terms of male agency articulated through the figure of the male individual. Krasner, engaging with Action Painting's intuitive gestural language with its emphasis on a subjectivity produced through the physical actions of the body in relation to the canvas, was forced to confront the ways her own body was inscribed as “feminine.” Anne Wagner has argued that Krasner's art during this period was marked by its refusal to produce a self in painting. She concludes that Krasner resisted, allowing herself to emerge in her art out of fear that it would betray her femaleness in a movement that prized male heroics. Resisting certain aspects of Pollock's art,

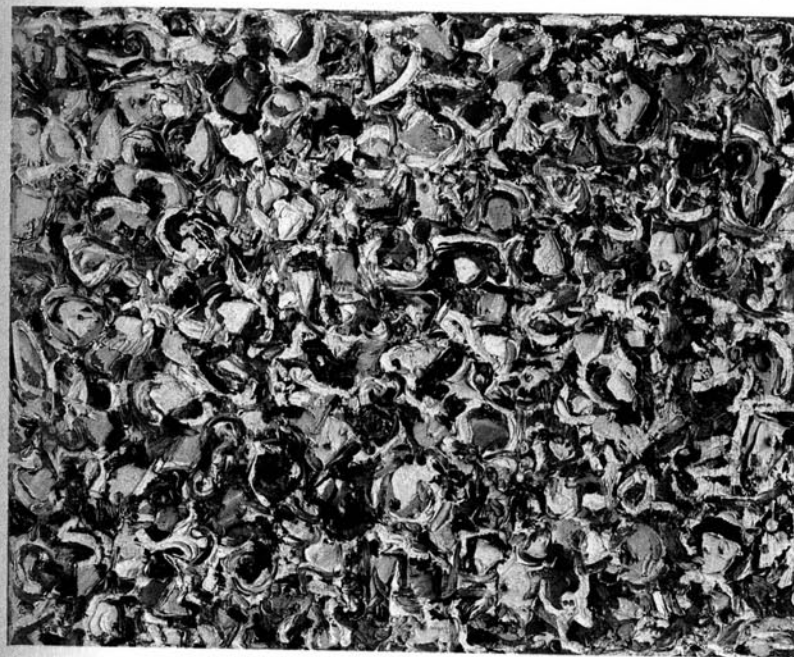


particularly his evocations of mythic and primitive imagery and his reliance on psychologically loaded symbols, she attempted to establish a difference that could not be dismissed as the otherness of woman.

To position herself independently of Pollock's forceful artistic personality, Krasner had to separate herself from the construction of masculine subjectivity embedded in Abstract Expressionism, as well as from a European tradition that included Hans Hoffman and the Cubists, previously the strongest influence on her work. Moreover, the shift from government-sponsored, non-discriminatory art projects to the emerging world of the private dealer/gallery/critic also meant seeing Mrs. Pollock/wife overshadow Lee Krasner/painter in New York's art world.

As she struggled to lay claim to the all-over images produced through automatism, Krasner began to approach painting as a meditative exercise. Seeking to obliterate figurative references and hierarchical composition, she worked and re-worked her canvases, scraping them down until nothing remained but granular gray slabs two to three inches thick, most of which she eventually destroyed. Not until 1946 did images that satisfied her begin to appear out of the effaced "grounds" of gray. The "Little Image" paintings that resulted oppose the mural-size canvases that were later accepted as defining the ambition of the (male) Abstract Expressionists. Their untranslatable hieroglyphic surfaces suggest unconscious linguistic structures.

The elegant intimacy of Krasner's "Little Images" may be linked to her fascination with Irish and Persian illuminated manuscripts, or with the Hebrew inscriptions familiar from her childhood. The process out of which they emerged, however, and the crisis which generated them, demand rereading in the light of psychoanalytically oriented theories of the 1970s and 1980s about women's relationship to writing, a term which must be understood in the larger context of meaningful mark-making. The oscillation between women's annexation of male forms and the denial of those same forms that often leads to blankness and silence as women try to find their place within what Xavière Gauthier has called the "linear, grammatical linguistic system that orders the symbolic, the superego, the law," has provoked intense debates among feminists. "It is by writing . . . and by taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus, that women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence," argues Hélène Cixous, for example, in "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1975). Art historians have only recently begun to explore the impli-



192 Lee Krasner *Noon* 1947

cations of the Abstract Expressionist gesture as a rhetorical device and their investigations promise to shed new light on this important area.

Krasner and other women Abstract Expressionists were well aware of the operations of sexual difference within artistic practice. During the 1940s and 1950s, they confronted the widely held view that women "couldn't paint." Teachers like Hofmann, following an example set earlier by Freud's disciple, Havelock Ellis, believed that "only men had the wings for art." The highest praise he offered his female students, including Krasner, was contained in the remark: "this painting is so good you'd never know it was done by a woman."

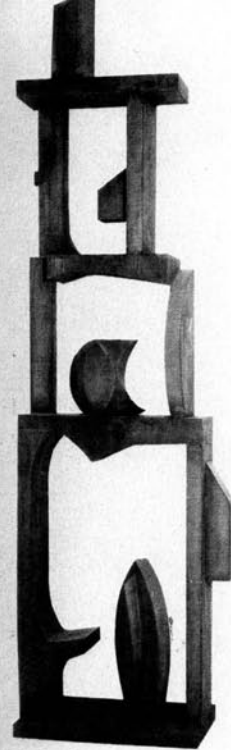
The tensions between an ideology of sexual difference—one that assured jobs for returned servicemen, supported the shift of population to the suburbs, and provided "meaningful" work for women through homemaking—and vanguard art can be seen in painting and sculpture, by men as well as women. The sculptor David Smith, whose complicated relationship with the sculptor Dorothy Dehner

(1901–94) inflected the work of both during the 1940s, linked the body of woman to home in *The Home of the Welder*, a bronze of 1945–46 with the torso of a woman in bas-relief on one side, and a stylized mother and child in bas-relief on the other. For Smith, the body of woman signified not only physical home, but also the mental and emotional source of male creative activity. For Dehner, the demands of marriage and art proved incompatible and she began to work professionally as a sculptor only after leaving Smith and her home in 1950.

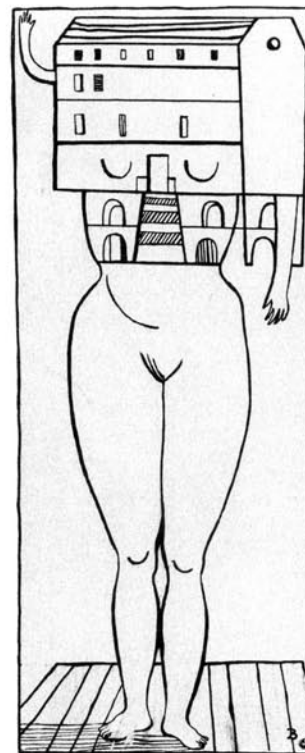
Many women artists, encouraged by their teachers to divorce art practice from female experience and self-awareness in order to succeed professionally, found themselves painfully aware of the contradictions between artistic and personal identity. The nexus of body/home/art is central to the early work of Louise Bourgeois (b. 1911) whose *femme-maison* paintings were exhibited in 1947. Although Bourgeois pointed to the home as a place of conflict for the woman artist, critics read the paintings as affirming a “natural” identification between women and home. Her paintings of 1947 evolved out of earlier ones based on the grid, a structural form familiar to her from her early weaving and tapestry, and from her training in Cubist abstraction. Under the influence of Surrealism, she developed the personal, quasi-figurative imagery of these *femme-maison* paintings with their houses perched on top of women’s bodies in place of heads. In these disquieting works, domesticity, imaged through blank facades and small windows, defines women but denies them speaking voices. “Hers is a world of women,” wrote one critic. “Blithely they emerge from chimneys, or, terrified, they watch from their beds as curtains fly from a nightmare window. A whole family of females proves their domesticity by having houses for heads.”

The presence of a politics of gender in Bourgeois’s work has been recognized only in retrospect, in the light of more recent feminist-inspired investigations into the workings of socially assigned notions of difference and the gradual acknowledgment of Bourgeois’s contribution in creating a body of work remarkable for its personal, associative, autobiographical, and emotional content.

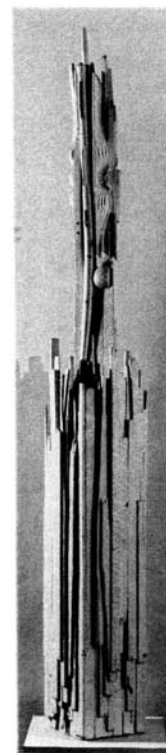
Her exhibition as a sculptor in 1949 included a group of tall, narrow wooden sculptures, several of which display moving “arms.” Art historian Ann Gibson points to these works as examples of Bourgeois’s use of the language of war as metaphor for gender. Drawings, prints, paintings, and sculpture produced during these years of the Cold War display images that oscillate between vulnerability



193 Dorothy Dehner
Scaffold 1983



194 Louise Bourgeois
Femme-Maison c. 1946–47



195 Louise Nevelson
Totem II 1959

and an “aggressive machismo,” figures that suggest both spears and phallic instruments of penetration. “It is a period without feet,” Bourgeois recalls. “During that period things were not grounded. They expressed a great fragility and uncertainty. . . . If I pushed them, they would have fallen. And this was self-expression.”

In 1949, the Club and the Eighth Street Club were founded and became, along with the Cedar Bar, the major public meeting places for the New York School painters, whose intense discussions with critics and curators concerning the new avant-garde admitted women largely as audience. Confined to the margins of a largely male discourse, women functioned as decorative accessories of Bohemia, their presence often seen as confirming the heterosexuality and “masculinity” of their partners. Although Krasner, Joan Mitchell, Elaine de Kooning, and Mercedes Matter were among the club’s few female members, the

painters Paul Brach and Miriam Schapiro (b. 1923), who regularly attended meetings, remember no women at board meetings or policy discussions. Women were “treated like cattle” at the Cedar Bar, Krasner later recalled. Between 1948 and 1951, *Art News* ran articles on Willem de Kooning, Clyfford Still, Mark Rothko, Jackson Pollock, and Arshile Gorky. By 1951, *Art News* and Thomas Hess’s *Abstract Painting*, published that year, were championing the older artists associated with the new painting. Krasner, still struggling to define her relationship to the new abstraction, found herself placed among a “second generation” that soon included Helen Frankenthaler, Joan Mitchell, Grace Hartigan, Hedda Sterne, Elaine de Kooning, Sonia Getchoff, and Ethel Schwabacher.

Mitchell, Frankenthaler, and Hartigan were ambitious artists who received positive critical support during the early 1950s and whose work was included in major Abstract Expressionist exhibitions. Yet all of them struggled, as did Krasner, to define a difference from the painting of their male contemporaries that could not be reduced to the difference of women. Mitchell (1926–92) arrived in New York from Chicago in 1949 and participated in the Ninth Street Show in 1951, exhibiting canvases in which amorphous forms, influenced by Gorky’s biomorphic shapes, flow in and out of ambiguous spaces. Paintings like *Untitled* (1950) and *Cross Section of a Bridge* (1951) show a tension between direct, vigorous brushstrokes and sensuous surface color. Hartigan’s (b. 1922) period of abstraction, on the other hand,

196 Joan Mitchell *Cross Section of a Bridge* 1951



197 Grace Hartigan *Persian Jacket* 1952

197 was brief, lasting only until 1952, but she produced paintings characterized by strong, gestural brushwork and clashing colors and lines. One of the first abstract women artists of her generation to earn an international reputation, her painting *Persian Jacket* (1952) was purchased by the Museum of Modern Art in 1952. However, Hartigan's subsequent decision to give up abstraction and introduce recognizable forms into her work—many of them reminiscent of de Kooning's women—was prompted, at least in part, by ambivalence over her attitude toward the visual language of Abstract Expressionism. In 1974, she referred to the problem of feeling that her images were derived from the more established male artists: "I began to get guilty for walking in and freely taking their form . . . without having gone through their struggle for content, or having any context except an understanding of formal qualities."

In 1949, Krasner and Pollock had exhibited in Sidney Janis's group exhibition "Man and Wife." The very title of the exhibition organized women's productions into a subsidiary, socially defined category. The experience, and the negative reviews of her work, proved wrenching and Krasner did not exhibit again until 1951, later destroying most of the paintings from this period. Other women shared her awareness of the deep divisions in the play of sexual difference within social ideology and artistic practice. Krasner and Elaine de Kooning both chose to sign their works with initials only, while Hartigan briefly adopted the sobriquet "George" (in homage to George Sand and George Eliot). In each case, the decision to erase gender as part of the creative process was less an attempt to hide their identities as women than to evade being labeled "feminine" by becoming the man/woman whose creative efforts earned praise.

Helen Frankenthaler (b. 1928) is the only woman painter of the period who has consistently dismissed gender as an issue. Yet critics since the early 1950s follow the model used to contain the considerable talents of O'Keeffe and other previous women artists. Constructing a special category for her work in which color and touch are read as "feminine," they ceased examining it in relation to its specific historical context and instead linked it to an unchanging and essentialized tradition of women's work.

In 1952, Frankenthaler began staining color directly into large pieces of unsized, unprinted duck laid on her studio floor. *Mountains and Sea* (1952), her first major stained canvas, contains richly colored masses and fluid forms reminiscent of Gorky's and Willem de Kooning's biomorphism. Although Frankenthaler benefited from



198 Helen Frankenthaler *Mountains and Sea* 1952

199 Lee Krasner *Cat Image* 1957



Clement Greenberg's consistent critical support, it was not until the painters Kenneth Noland and Morris Louis adopted her technique that she was accorded status as an "innovator." She was not the first artist to stain canvases but she was the first to develop a complete formal vocabulary from the technique. "It is free, lyrical, and feminine—very different from the more insistent and regular rhythms of the best and most typical Pollocks of the late 40s and early 50s," wrote a later critic, overlooking the fact that both Pollock's and Rothko's use of the staining technique had resulted in softened and sensuous colors.

Atmospheric and landscape references remained strong in the works of Mitchell, Frankenthaler, and Schwabacher during the 1950s, for Hofmann's influential teachings emphasized nature as a source. All of the artists involved with Abstract Expressionism identified the process of generating images with "nature" ("I am nature," Pollock declaimed), but the differing relationships of male and female painters to this very important aspect remain to be clarified. Schwabacher (1903–84) made the transition to Abstract Expressionism through images directly equating biological reproduction and artistic genesis, and both she and Willem de Kooning produced controversial images of women which specifically referred to a nature/culture dichotomy.

After Pollock's death in 1956, Krasner turned to large-scale, hybrid anthropomorphic forms in a series of disturbing paintings which Barbara Rose has called "an exorcism of her feelings of rage, guilt, pain, and loss." A period of intense creative activity followed during which she fully developed a unique idiom. Deliberately choosing colors with "feminine" connotations, she used them in ways that negated their traditional associations. In paintings like *Cat Image* (1957), pastel tones, foliate shapes, and egg forms combine with brushwork and aggressive loaded forms to produce the large works that ultimately secured her place in Abstract Expressionism.

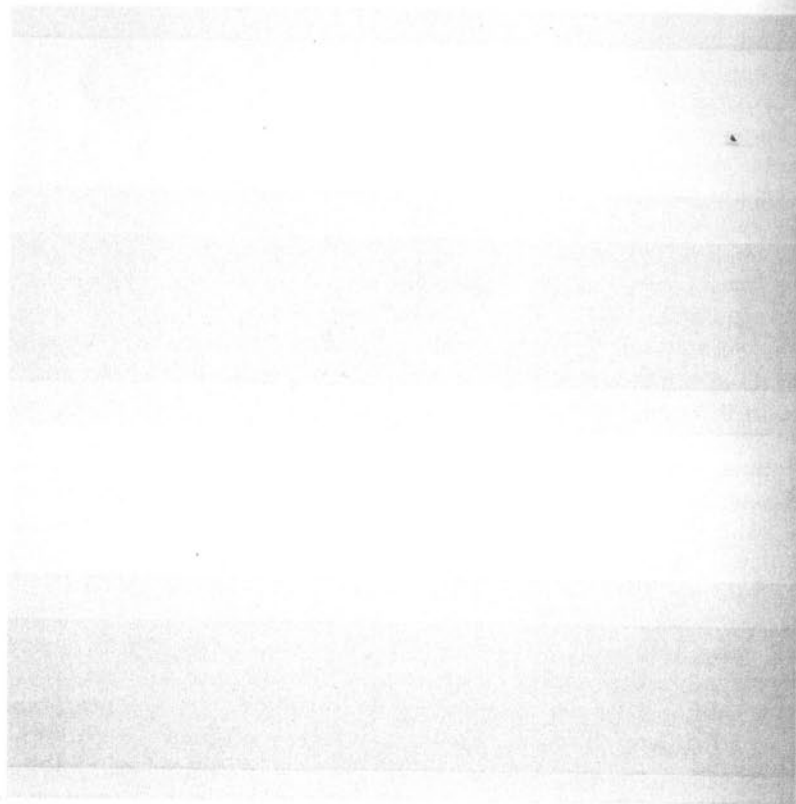
Louise Nevelson (1900–88), like Krasner, also worked with cast-off and recycled materials during the 1950s. They, and other women of their generation, worked steadily for many years before receiving the recognition given their male contemporaries at a much earlier date. Despite exhibiting since 1941, and having her work widely acknowledged abroad, Nevelson did not receive a solo museum exhibition in the United States until 1960. Germaine Richier (1904–59), who had exhibited in Europe since 1934, had her first solo exhibition in New York in 1957; Barbara Hepworth's first retrospective exhibition in London, followed by the public commissions that finally enabled her

to work at the scale she had long desired, took place in 1954, after twenty-five years of steady work.

Despite a lack of institutional support, however, the period from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s was important in bringing recognition to a number of women sculptors. Nevelson had studied painting with Hofmann in Munich during the 1930s and won her first sculpture competition at the A.C.A. Galleries, New York, in 1936, but the blatantly sexist critical response to her first major exhibition at the Nierendorf Gallery, also New York, in 1946 drove her from the gallery world for almost ten years. "We learned the artist was a woman, in time to check our enthusiasm," wrote one critic. "Had it been otherwise, we might have hailed these sculptural expressions as by surely a great figure among the moderns."

In 1955, Nevelson exhibited, and was acclaimed for, her first environment, *Ancient Games and Ancient Places*. Fusing Cubism and Constructivism, Dada readymade and Surrealist dream-object, she began constructing entire walls out of crates, boxes, architectural fragments, pieces of pianos, stair railings, chair slats, and other urban bric-à-brac. The mat black of the elements, painted before assemblage, unified form and surface, and the wall-size constructions created new environments within the gallery. *Moon Garden Plus One* (1958), her first entire wall, was arranged in the Grand Central Moderns Gallery to take advantage of its unusual light. "Appalling and marvellous," wrote Hilton Kramer, "utterly shocking in the way they violate our received ideas on the limits of sculpture . . . yet profoundly exhilarating in the way they open an entire realm of possibility." Yet part of the astonishment was directed at a woman working in sculpture and on a scale that rivaled that of male artists.

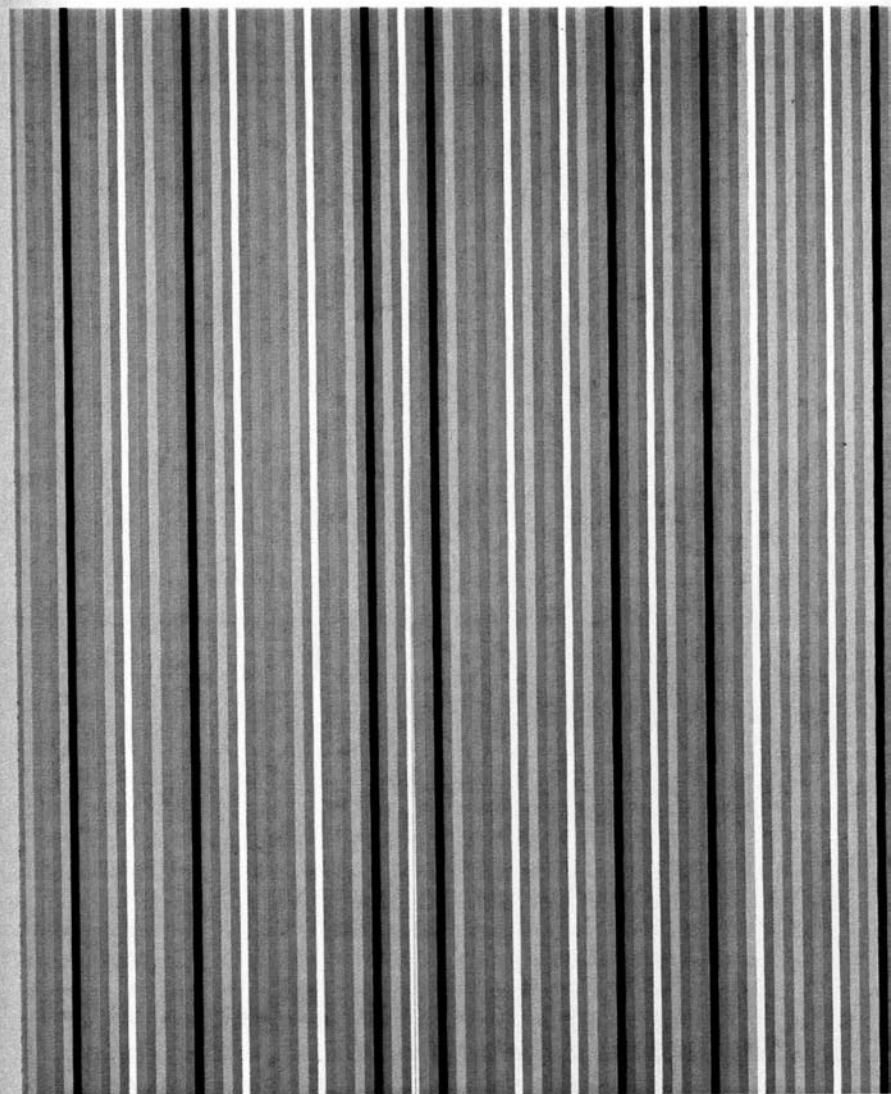
By the end of the 1950s many artists were turning away from the drama of Abstract Expressionism and denouncing symbolic, mythic, and subjective content as rhetorical devices. A younger generation of artists embraced the mechanical processes and everyday imagery of Pop art, or the non-relational, colorful surfaces of Postpainterly Abstraction and the industrially fabricated geometrical solids of Minimal sculpture. Although faithful to the scale and direct impact of Abstract Expressionism, younger artists cultivated detachment from the process of making images. The exhibition organized by Greenberg at French & Co. in 1959–60 emphasized pure color as an expressive vehicle in works which favored flat, non-textured paint surfaces and non-illusionistic space. Frankenthaler, Jo Baer, Schapiro, Agnes Martin (1912–2004)—whose pencilled grids aimed at a balance between the



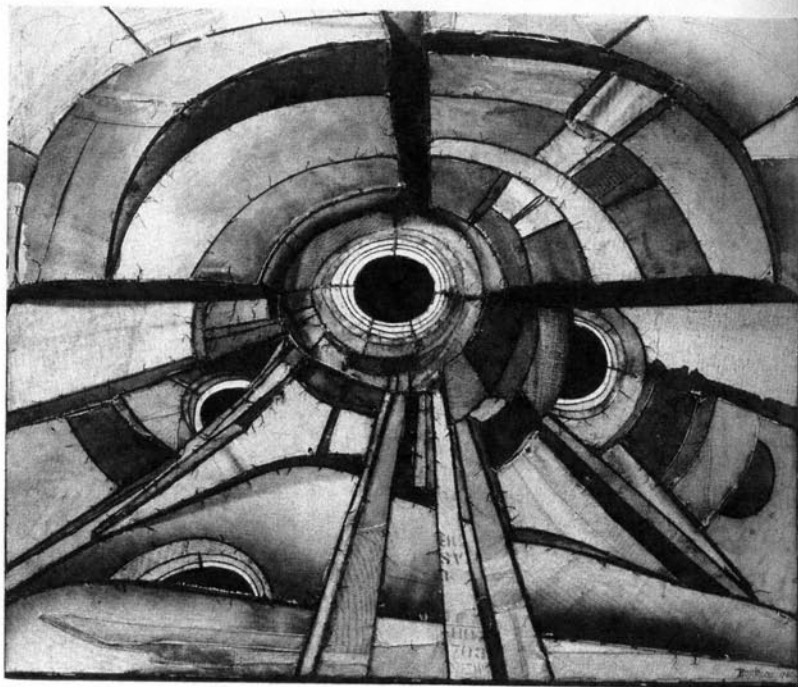
200 Agnes Martin *Untitled #9* 1990

individuality of the mark and the impersonality of the structure—and the British Op artist, Bridget Riley (b. 1931), were among the women who adapted to this dominant language of formalist abstraction.

Riley and Martin, working relatively independently of art world fashion, have pursued uncompromising visions of a reductive abstraction that continue to influence younger painters. Martin's barely perceptible grids and delicate pencil lines against faintly modulated backgrounds evoke feelings of joy, light and infinite expanses. "My paintings have neither objects nor space nor time nor anything," she has said. "They are light, lightness, about merging, about formlessness breaking down forms." Riley's uncompromising non-figurative work,



201 Bridget Riley *Winter Palace* 1981

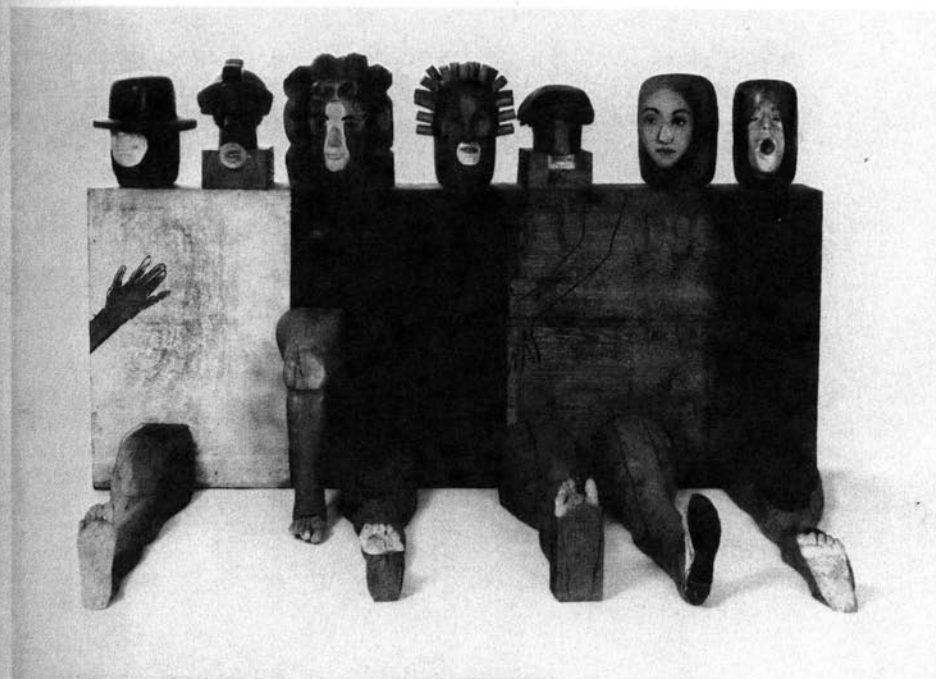


202 Lee Bontecou *Untitled* 1960

which first attracted critical attention during the Op art movement of the 1960s, addresses itself to the formal issues of painting: the nature of color and pictorial space, shape and flatness, the relation of feeling to color and image, the historical traditions of painting.

The relative lack of attention paid by mainstream galleries and critics to artists working in alternative ways helped perpetuate the fiction of the mainstream as monolithic and masculine, a world in which women functioned only as exceptions, or in which they were forced to deny any identification with other women. Riley seemed to speak for many ambitious women when she later said: "Women's liberation when applied to artists seems to me a naive concept. It raises issues which in this context are quite absurd. At this particular point in time, artists who happen to be women need this particular form of hysteria like they need a hole in the head."

It is significant, however, that among the women who received the greatest critical attention during the early 1960s were three sculptors whose work, in fact, embodied highly subjective responses to main-



203 Marisol *Self-Portrait* 1961-62

stream concerns. In retrospect, the work of Bontecou, Marisol, and Niki de Saint Phalle appears ever more pointedly at odds with the cultivated detachment and cool imagery of mainstream art, as well as with the slick media-derived female imagery of Pop art.

Bontecou (b. 1931) studied sculpture at the Art Students' League with William Zorach and spent several years in Rome on a Fulbright Fellowship. Her large, rugged constructions were fabricated from worn-out commercial laundry conveyor belts which she sewed onto steel frames. First shown in 1960, they were compared to everything from airplane engines to female sexual parts. They exerted a considerable influence on Eva Hesse, Robert Morris, and other Process artists interested in exploring the use of non-traditional industrial materials in sculpture in the late 1960s.

Marisol, born in Paris of Venezuelan parents in 1930, had lived in New York since 1950. Around 1954, influenced by Jasper Johns's *Target with Four Faces*, she began putting little terracotta figures in boxes. Her exhibition at the Stable Gallery in 1962 catapulted her



204 (above) Niki de Saint Phalle *Nana* c. 1965



205 (left) Louise Bourgeois *Fillette* 1968

into the public eye. "The first girl artists with glamour," Andy Warhol declared and his remark was followed by extensive media attention to Marisol's life, her beauty, and her enigmatic silences. Marisol's representational images based on American figures were immediately linked to Pop art, but her work in fact has sources in Precolumbian art, early American folk carving, and Surrealist dream images. A 1964 exhibition included *The Wedding*, *Andy Warhol*, *John Wayne*, *Double Date*, and *The Babies*. Women encased and imprisoned in wooden blocks and stultifying social roles, endlessly repeated figures, monstrous babies, and Pop heroes dominated. Often she incorporated parts of herself in her work and her obsessive use of self-images, when combined with stereotypical presentations of women living out circumscribed roles, built a chilling picture of American middle-class life in the 1960s.

Saint Phalle (1930–2002) also offered up images of women that ran counter to formalist aesthetics during the years when Pop art gave us slick nudes, pin-ups, and sex objects. Her work, with its playful absurdity and ephemeral objects, made little critical impact in a New York art world dedicated to Minimalism, but her monstrous female figures were impossible to ignore. A member of the Nouveaux Réalistes, a group of European neo-Dada artists active during the 1960s, Saint Phalle's work is a kind of precursor to feminist art concerns of the 1970s. Her large-scale female figures evolved out of earlier assemblage and collage pieces of statuary, figurines, toys, dolls, and other found objects which she reassembled into chaotic tableaux.

The early "Nanas," gaily painted and exaggerated figures at once child-like and monstrous, archetypal and toy-like, were constructed on chicken-wire frames covered with fabric and yarn to create intricately textured surfaces. Aggressive but also wildly funny, they were like Willem de Kooning's *Women* stripped of the violence and misogyny. At the same time, they refused the mythic and romantic fantasies projected by men onto images of women.

In 1966, Saint Phalle produced *Hon* (She), a temporary monument at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm on which she collaborated with Jean Tinguely and Per Olof Ultvedt. Eighty-two feet long, *Hon* lay on her back on the ground, knees raised, heels planted. Spectators entered the figure through the vagina and found themselves in a female body that functioned as playground, amusement park, shelter, and pleasure palace with a milk-bar installed in one breast and an early Greta Garbo film playing elsewhere. Saint Phalle's *Hon* reclaimed woman's body as a site of tactile pleasure rather than an

object of voyeuristic viewing; the figure was both a playful and colorful homage to woman as nurturer and a potent demythologizer of male romantic notions of the female body as a "dark continent" and unknowable reality.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, challenges to the hegemony of Modernism began to take place on many, often overlapping, fronts. Decisions by many artists to work outside the mainstream gallery/dealer system were part of a reaction against the growing commodification of the art object and the dehumanization of Pop, Postpainterly Abstraction, and Minimal art. Process artists reacted against the glamor of the object, replacing machine-finished and expensive industrial materials with the by-products of industrial civilization: raw wood, rubber, felt, and other materials of no intrinsic value. Conceptual artists replaced objects with framed propositions and ideas. And, after 1970, many women began to formulate specifically feminist works based on a commitment to radical social change that addressed the ways that women's experience has been suppressed and/or marginalized in Western culture.

During the later 1960s, challenges to Modernism's focus on aesthetic purity and transcendence, and the closely linked formalist aesthetic theories of Clement Greenberg with their emphasis on the work of art as self-contained and engaged with a critique of the medium, occurred on many fronts, not all of them feminist, and not all of them restricted to women. Areas in which the work of women artists would have a significant and lasting impact included the use of new materials and processes, the development of collective and collaborative ways of working, performance and body art, minimalism, earthworks and public art, and of course feminist art (that is, art that self-consciously embodies an aspect of feminism's political agenda; see Chapter 12). While this work is not necessarily or intrinsically feminine, art historian Ann Gibson has suggested that it is historically feminine in its opposition to the reductive, totalizing, patriarchal aesthetics that have characterized Modernism. Although these developments took place internationally, the close identification of post-Second World War Modernism with institutions and practices in New York encourages a closer look at that cultural context. It is not possible to acknowledge the contributions of the many women working during this period, and the brief survey that follows can only identify a few major tendencies and touch upon representative issues raised by women.

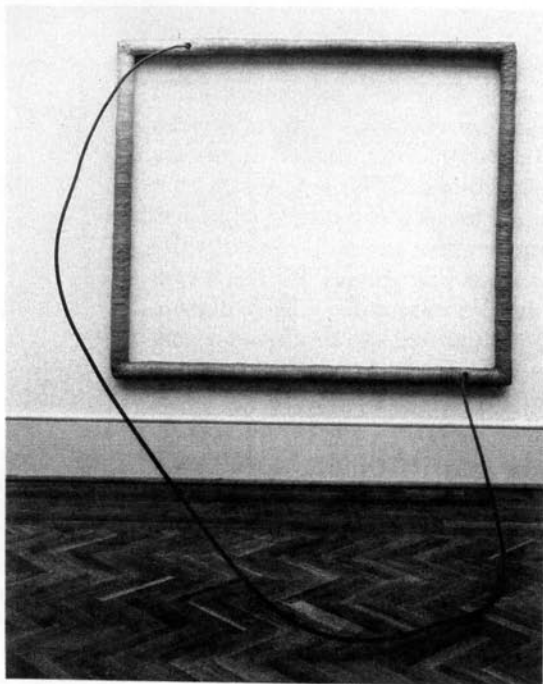
By the mid-1960s, a number of New York artists were incorporat-

ing non-art materials and new technologies into their work. Shigeko Kubota (b. 1937), who graduated from Tokyo University with a degree in sculpture, moved to New York in 1964. Inspired by the work of John Cage and David Tudor, she became involved with the avant-garde Fluxus Group, which also included Yoko Ono, George Maciunas, Alan Kaprow, and Nam June Paik. A decade-long obsession with Marcel Duchamp, whom she met on the way to Buffalo for the opening of Merce Cunningham's ballet, *Walk Around Time*, led to a series of sculptural installations that incorporate video. Using shifting camera angles and image processing techniques, she produced a version of Duchamp's 1912 painting *Nude Descending a Staircase* that represents the mechanized nude from a female perspective.

Around 1964 Eva Hesse (1936–70), a New York artist whose family had fled Nazi Germany when she was three years old, began to use industrial materials in sculpture that resisted the geometric and architectural ambitions of Minimalism. She worked with rope, latex, rubberized cheesecloth, clay, metal, and wire mesh in pieces that are additive, tactile, and radical in their witty and iconoclastic use of media. In 1966, feminist and critic Lucy Lippard included Hesse's work in the exhibition "Eccentric Abstraction" (which introduced the term "process art"). Along with Richard Serra, Carl Andre, Keith Sonnier, Robert Smithson, Robert Morris, Sol LeWitt, and others, Hesse adopted emotionally associative materials and structures in which layering, displacement, and serialization focused attention on process, anti-industrial technologies, and siting. Her notes and diaries from this period form an integral part of the investigative process that made up her work. Although she did not identify herself as a feminist, she was acutely aware of the contradictions between her commitment to her art and the social expectations demanded of women. "I cannot be so many things," she wrote in her diary in January 1964. "I cannot be something for everyone. . . . Woman, beautiful, artist, wife, housekeeper, cook, saleslady, all these things. I cannot even be myself or know who I am."

Hang Up (1966), a spare rectangular frame with a thin but flexible rod looping out from it and then back, is characteristic of her work in refusing to declare its meaning or to locate an inner "truth"; the frame presents a self-contained object, but the line which registers the mark of the artist is drawn in space, not captured permanently on a surface.

Critics have remarked on the erotic qualities of Hesse pieces like *Ringaround Arosie* (1965) and *Accession II* (1967) with their spongy membranes, their interiors bristling with soft projections, and their



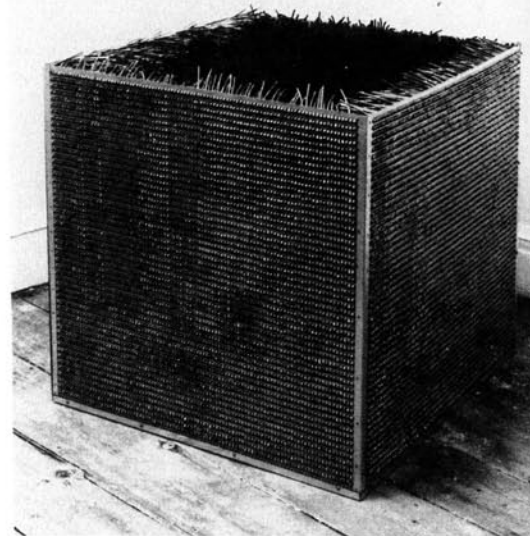
206 Eva Hesse *Hang Up* 1966

use of accretion to build up forms. Like Robert Morris's *Cock/Cunt* sculpture of 1963, with its schematic imagery of sexual difference and copulation, they suggest that the most abstract forms may be coded in ways that index the body metaphorically rather than literally. During the later 1960s, Louise Bourgeois's work also began to display a more tactile eroticism and her personal, intuitive sculptural forms became a rallying point for many younger women artists! Bulbous, abstract shapes and penile forms are replicated in a variety of materials from marble, bronze and plaster to latex, sometimes merging organically into composite forms, often part phallic, part fecal. The primary sensual world she evokes is undifferentiated and "polymorphously per-

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verse." One critic described her latex *Fillette* (1968) as "a big, suspended decaying phallus, definitely on the rough side." Other pieces, like her series of small, female figures in plaster, clay, bronze, wax and marble, are both aggressive and vulnerable.

The work of Bourgeois, Hesse, Marisol, and Saint Phalle implied content that could not be accommodated by formalist aesthetics, or by reducing the significance of gender to the sex of the artist or to her conscious intentions. By 1966, the first rumblings of dissent were



207 Eva Hesse *Accession II* 1967

beginning to be heard in America and elsewhere. Within a few years, the cultural conflicts that divided a generation of Americans—racism, sexism, and militarism—invaded the art world, until then secure in the belief that aesthetic issues were unrelated to or transcended social concerns. It is black artists and women (black and white)—Romare Bearden, Raymond Saunders, Betye Saar, Faith Ringgold, Elizabeth Catlett, May Stevens—who first gave visual form to the growing gulf between the white American dream and the black American reality. Although Pop's embrace of American media imagery occasionally included images of blacks, their presence had tended to confirm white conventions and stereotypes. It is Romare Bearden's collages, the sculpture and prints of Elizabeth Catlett, and the paintings of Raymond Saunders and Faith Ringgold that focused attention on the distance between the black community and the American mainstream.

Among Catlett's works from the 1960s are several on the theme of equal rights, including the series *Civil Rights* (1969), and the figurative sculptures *Black Unity* (1968) and *Homage to My Young Black Sisters* (1969), which later became icons in the struggle for social jus-

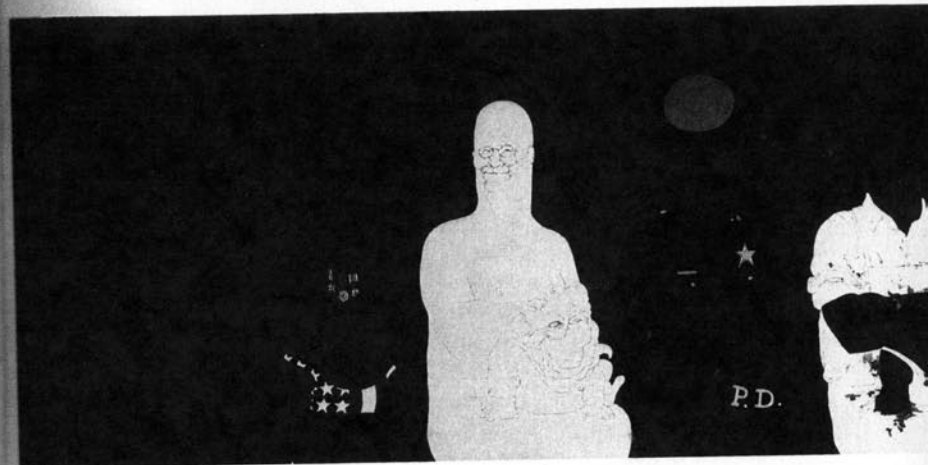


208 Faith Ringgold *Die* 1967

tice. She used the technique of linocut to commemorate black leaders in *Malcolm X Speaks For Us* (1969) and *Homage to the Panthers* (1970).

During the 1960s Ringgold (b. 1930), an African-American raised in Harlem, and May Stevens, a white painter from New York, also investigated the connections between patriarchy, racism, and imperialism. Ringgold's *American People Series* (1963–67) was influenced by the writings of James Baldwin and Amiri Baraka (then LeRoi Jones). In 1966, she participated in the first exhibition of black artists held in Harlem since the 1930s. The following year Ringgold exhibited *Die*, a twelve-foot wide mural of a street riot painted in a simplified representational style influenced by the 1930s realism of painters like Jacob Lawrence and Ben Shahn.

By 1968 May Stevens (b. 1924), who had also played an active role in the Civil Rights Movement, was producing images in response to the current racial strife. In *Big Daddy, Paper Doll* (1968), fragmented but menacing male figures are used to explore the relationship between patriarchal power in the family and in social institutions like the American judicial system. At about the same time, the California artist Betye Saar (b. 1926) began incorporating stereotypic images of blacks in collages and constructions. Inspired by Joseph Cornell's boxes, their content, however, was political and angry rather than dream-like and Surrealist. *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima* (1972), one of a group of works dealing with white culture's stereotypical images of blacks, included an Aunt Jemima image holding a small revolver in



209 May Stevens *Big Daddy, Paper Doll* 1968

210 Betye Saar
The Liberation of Aunt Jemima 1972



one hand and a rifle in the other in a box papered with "mammy" pictures.

A series of events in late 1969 and early 1970 led to the first protests against racism and sexism in the American art world; out of these interventions, and the growing Women's Liberation Movement, came the feminist art activities of the 1970s. In December 1969, New York's Whitney Museum Annual opened with 143 artists, only eight of whom were women. Demonstrations against the museum led to the formation of Women Artists in Revolution (WAR) within the Art Workers' Coalition; Ringgold organized Women Students and Artists for Black Art Liberation (WASABAL); and the New York Art Strike Against War, Racism, Fascism, Sexism and Repression, organized by the Art Workers Coalition, closed New York museums for one day in May 1970. Ringgold and WASABAL also launched a highly effective protest against an exhibition at the School of Visual Arts in New York organized by Robert Morris which attacked United States policies of war, repression, racism, and sexism but included no women artists (later amended due to the effectiveness of the protest). By 1970, the Art Workers' Coalition had collapsed and women artists in New York formed the Ad Hoc Women Artists' Committee, a loosely organized group that devoted the bulk of its energies to challenge successfully the number of women in the Whitney Annuals and to found the Women's Slide Registry. In the face of protests by blacks, students, and women, the fiction of an art world isolated from broader social and political issues by "objectivity," "quality," and "aesthetics" began to be exposed.

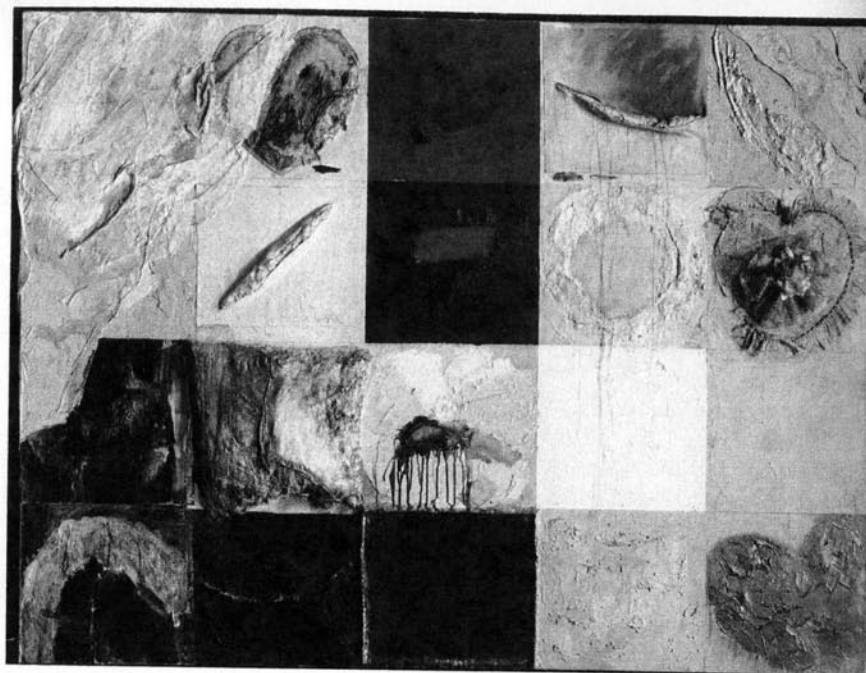
The work of Barbara Chase-Riboud (b. 1935) and Betye Saar was shown at the Whitney Museum (the first major museum exhibition of the work of contemporary black women artists) and Chase-Riboud dedicated the sculpture in her first solo show in New York to the memory of Malcolm X. When the percentage of women artists represented in the Whitney Annual rose from fifteen in 1969 to twenty-two in 1970, "museum officials conceded, somewhat reluctantly, that pressure from the women's groups was effective."

The feminist movement in the arts—that is, the commitment to an art that reflects women's political and social consciousness—profoundly influenced artistic practice in America during this period through its constant questioning of and challenge to patriarchal assumptions about ideologies of "art" and "artist" (see Chapter 12). A renewed interest in art produced by women generally also spread to a number of artists from an earlier generation, many of whom had

been professionally active since the 1930s. The work of Bourgeois, Neel, Bishop, Kahlo, Nevelson, and others began to receive the critical and public attention it had long deserved. While some women defined their practice in feminist terms, others rejected the designation altogether. Still others continued to work within abstraction, but saw their work inflected in new ways by their political and social consciousnesses. Although they chose to pursue non-figurative ways of working, artists from Joan Jonas and Dorothea Rockburne to Jackie Ferrara and Mary Miss have pointed to the efficacy of women's political organizing in the early 1970s in bringing curatorial and critical attention to their work.

During the early 1970s, women artists of the previous generation responded to the new, more open climate in a variety of ways. While some continued to insist that issues of gender were irrelevant in making art, others spoke out. Nevelson (1900–88), interviewed by Cindy Nemser, made her views of how women were treated in the New York art world very clear. Bourgeois participated in feminist meetings and took part in protests while Krasner, insisting that she was not a feminist, nevertheless picketed the Museum of Modern Art along with other women. In Mexico, Carrington designed an early Women's Liberation poster, *Mujeres consciencia*, while in New York and Paris, Dorothea Tanning and Meret Oppenheim announced their opposition to exhibitions of art that "ghettoized" women.

Throughout the decade, women identified and defined a multiplicity of relationships to feminist and mainstream concerns: "... we were all asking about feminism and what it means to be a woman," Joan Jonas later remarked. "The women's movement profoundly affected me; it led me, and all the people around me, to see things more clearly. I don't think before that I was aware of the roles women played. ... There is always a woman in my work, and her role is questioned." Throughout the decade, women continued to question existing definitions of form and materials. While some of this work was specifically feminist, other women, ignoring the sex of maker and audience, developed their forms within conceptual and pictorial interrogations of materials and processes which had begun during the 1960s but gained new momentum and support from the Women's Movement. The pioneering minimalist dances of Yvonne Rainer and the Judson Dance Group exerted a profound influence on artists like Joan Jonas and Dorothea Rockburne, as they worked to break the boundaries between sculpture and performance/video, and painting and sculpture. Jonas's performances *Jones Beach* (1970) and *Delay, Delay* (1972)



211 (opposite) Joan Snyder
Heart-On 1975

212 (right) Audrey Flack
Leonardo's Lady 1974

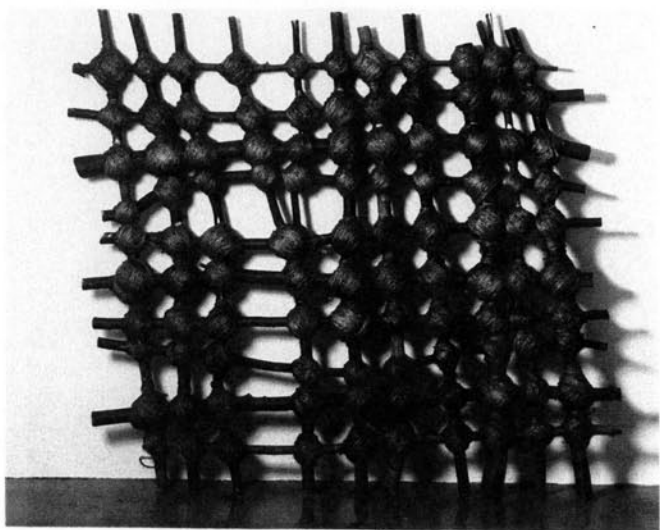
213 (below) Lynda Benglis
For Carl Andre 1970



mix sound, movement, and image in complex statements, while Rockburne's (b. 1932) carbon paper drawing/installations and folded paper and linen-based paintings attached directly to the wall drew on mathematical Set Theory and dance movement in works that redefined the illusionism of the painted image and the physicality of sculpture.

The combining of an abstract formal vocabulary with materials and forms inflected by female associations is also characteristic of the work of Joan Snyder, Lynda Benglis, Ree Morton, and others. Snyder's (b. 1940) paintings of the 1970s related to older traditions of abstraction, while increasingly using personal signs and marks. She first linked ostensibly non-referential passages in the paintings *Flesh/Art* (1973) and *Symphony III* (1975), where loose painterly fields coexist with fragmentary figurative references, and brushstrokes assume a variety of meanings, from drips, spills, and grids to gashes, tears, and blood. *Small Symphony for Women* (1974), *Vanishing Theater* (1974–75), and *Heart-On* (1975) combine and re-combine themes and images, transforming the individual consciousness behind the Abstract Expressionist gesture into a political response, born out of an awareness of the collective





214 Jackie Winsor
Bound Grid 1971–72

experiences of war, the student riots of the late 1960s, and the Women's Movement.

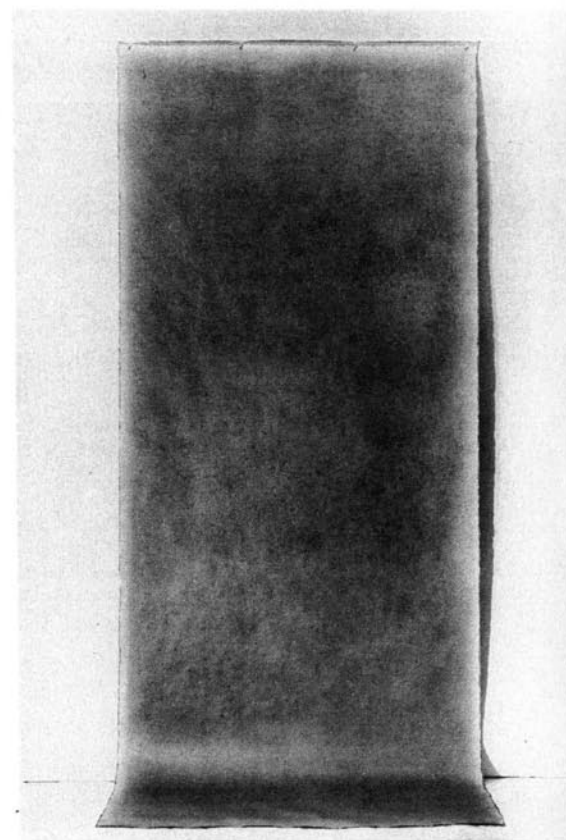
Snyder espoused feminist principles as she worked to infuse the language of abstraction with a content that was not formalist. Benglis (b. 1941), after first making narrow wax paintings as long as her arm, began pouring polyurethane pieces, moving from single freestanding objects to rows of extruded forms attached to the wall. Her subsequent use of rubber and latex was influenced by Hesse's choice of materials and by the work of Miriam Schapiro and Judy Chicago in California with its developing iconography of female imagery and costuming (see Chapter 12). Audrey Flack (b. 1931) repainted the *vanitas* as an icon of femininity using the neutral vision and meticulous brushstroke of the photorealists, while a number of artists, including Idelle Weber, Sylvia Mangold, and Janet Fish introduced new subjects into realist painting.

Hesse and Bourgeois used materials that had hardly ever been used before in sculpture to form objects that were powerfully tactile and suggestive, yet relied on an abstract formal language. By the early 1970s, a larger group of women artists had formed in New York, focusing on explorations into materials, process, and time. The natural and public worlds had been shaped by a series of exhibitions that began in 1966 with "Eccentric Abstraction," organized by Lucy

Lippard for the Fischbach Gallery, and continued with "Anti-Illusion: Process/Materials," organized by Marcia Tucker at the Whitney Museum in 1969, and "Twenty-Six Contemporary Women Artists" at the Aldrich Museum in 1971. Among those who exhibited at the latter, also organized by Lippard, were Alice Aycock, Mary Miss, Howardena Pindell, Adrian Piper, Jackie Winsor, and Barbara Zucker.

At an historical moment when feminism was encouraging many women to explore issues of autobiography, narrative, and personal identity in their work, other women embarked on investigations motivated by their interest in history, archaeology, and anthropology. Nancy Graves (1939–95), in her camel sculptures, and Jackie Winsor (b. 1941), in pieces made from plywood, pine, rope, twine, trees, lath and nails, also addressed issues of material and process. The labor-intensive process of binding used by Winsor in works such as *Bound Grid* (1971–72), and *30 to 1 Bound Trees* (1971) also recalls a hidden history of female productivity in areas like needlework, basketry, and quilting. Winsor's work made visible what has historically been a

215 Michelle Stuart
Niagara II 1976



hidden process—the complexity and labor of women's traditional handicrafts—establishing it in dialogue with traditional mainstream sculptural concerns such as those of scale and material.

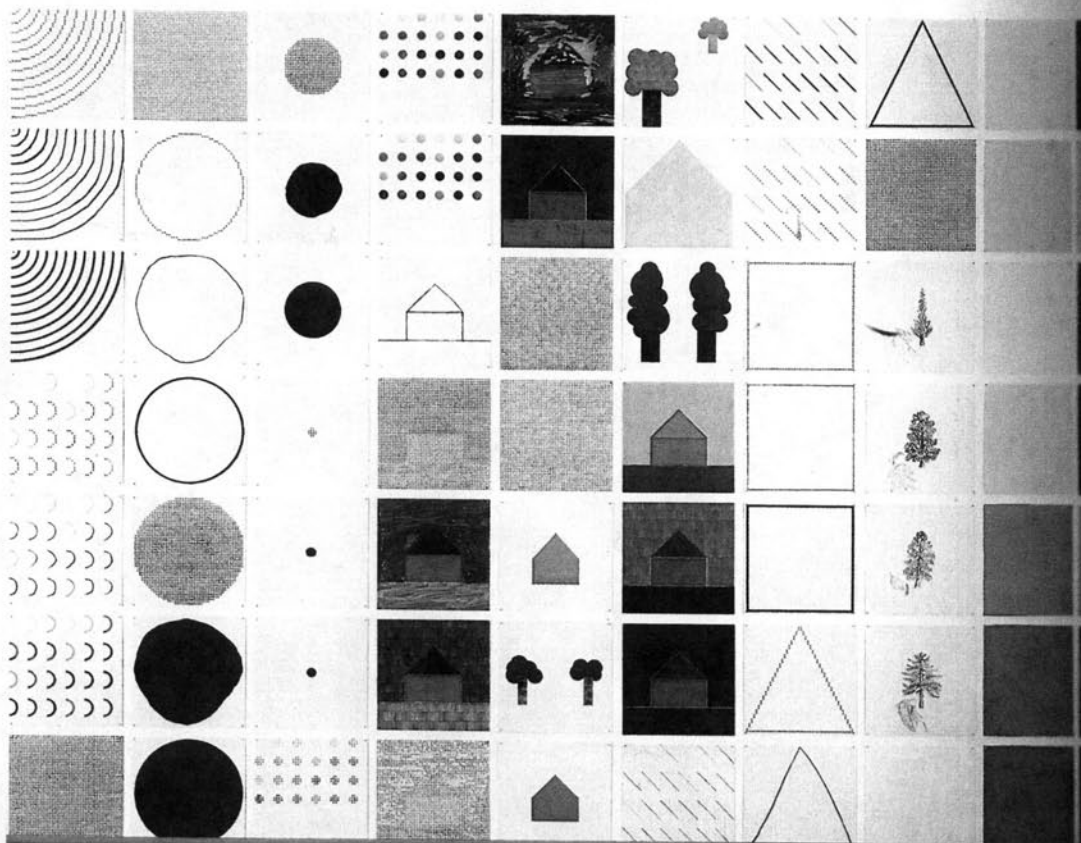
Many artists chose to put their works in the landscape rather than in the gallery. Graves's desire to connect the processes of art-making with other systems of knowledge, and Winsor's interest in natural materials and sites, were shared by other artists who, during the 1970s, began to use landscape forms and sites. In many cases, a desire to work in public developed in relation to an expanded view of social consciousness shaped by the social protest movements of the late sixties, the group experiences of feminism, and access to new sources of public funding in the arts. Although the move into the landscape corresponded with a growing public concern for the environment, earthworks had less to do with ecology in most instances than with expanding the boundaries of art. Although the works of, for example, Robert Smithson, Dennis Oppenheim, Nancy Holt, Walter DeMaria, Mary Miss, Alice Aycock, Michelle Stuart, and Michael Heizer took

place in nature, much of the work found its way back into the gallery in the form of materials and documentation. The monumental scale at which Smithson, DeMaria, Heizer, and Oppenheim worked is shared neither by women artists, nor by many of their European contemporaries, men or women. The reasons, however, have less to do with innate differences between men's and women's sensibilities, or their relationship to the earth and to nature, than with their differing access to the patronage which funded earthworks.

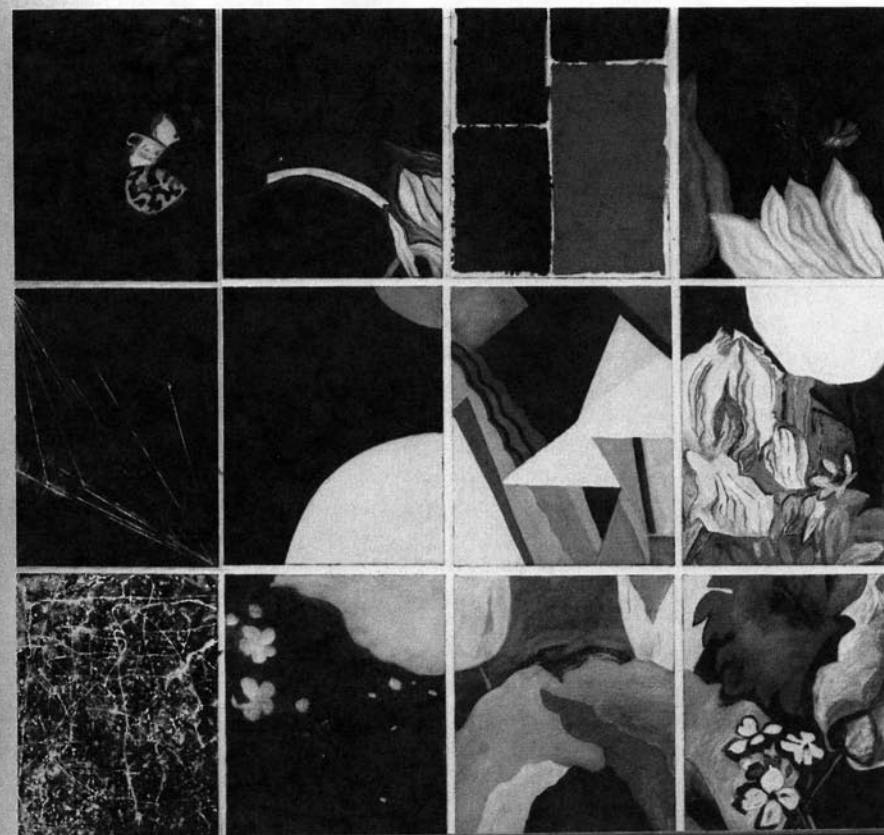
The work of many women sculptors reveals a concern with issues of geological time, the perception and experience of landscape, and the earth's annual cycles. It is about experiencing nature in terms of architectural sites, and about psychological, mythical, and historical associations with such sites. Michelle Stuart's (b. 1938) *Earth Scrolls* or drawings between 1973 and 1976 evoke a sense of geological time through the use of earth as a medium and the pulverization of rocks as a way of marking the paper. Literally using earth as her medium, Stuart's selections of rocks from different strata and geographic

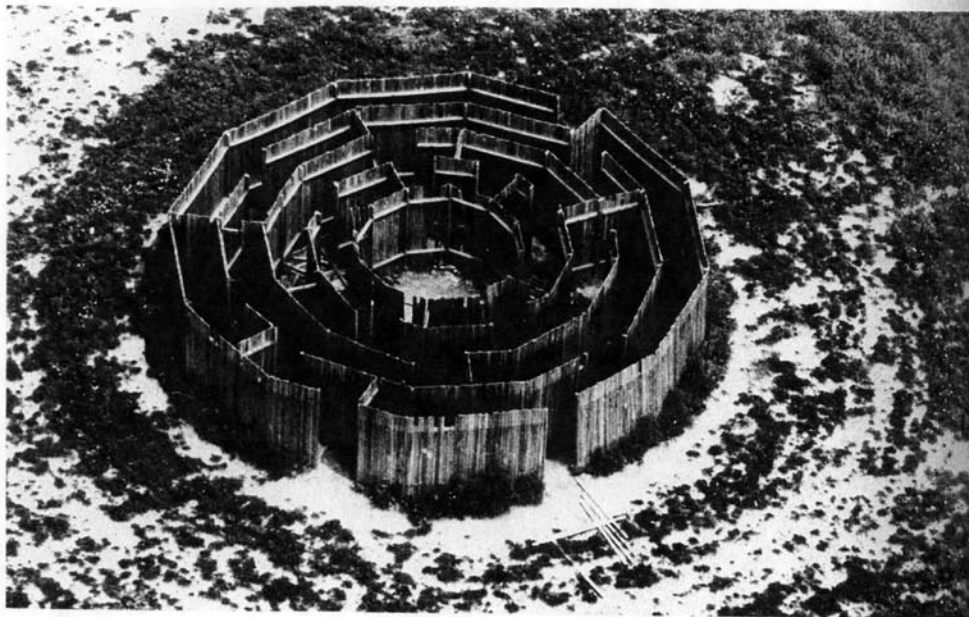
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216 Jennifer Bartlett *Rhapsody* 1975–76 (detail)



217 Pat Steir *The Breughel Series (A Vanitas of Styles)* 1981–83 (detail)





218 Alice Aycock *Maze* 1972

locations were based on her direct experience when growing up of the fissures and layers of southern California.

Miss, Aycock, George Trakis, Holt, and Michael Singer used sculptural form in their work to construct the landscape as the site of a visual and tactile experience. French sculptors Anne and Patrick Poirier invested in their archeological forms with mythic and fantastic associations. Miss's (b. 1944) *Perimeters, Pavilions/Decoys* (1978) included three towers and an underground atrium excavation as places from which to see and experience the land and sky. The scale was human and the whole work provided visual and experiential paradoxes: towers that could be seen into but not entered, underground chambers that could be entered but not seen. Aycock's (b. 1946) *Maze* (1972) makes use of a form rich in associations, ancient and contemporary, as do other structures by her such as the Battery Park installation (1980).

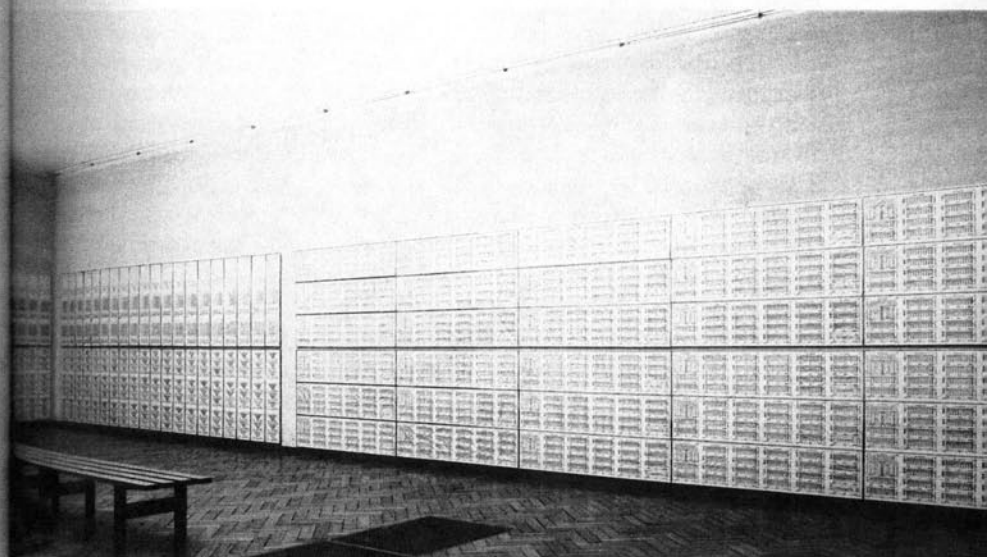
Sun Tunnels (1973–76) by Nancy Holt (b. 1938), also addresses issues of the timeless quality of the earth and its annual cycles. On a forty-acre

site which she purchased in the Great Basin Desert in northwestern Utah, four concrete tunnels are laid in an open X shape marking the seasonal extreme positions of the sun on the horizon. Holes of 7, 8, 9, and 10 inches in diameter in the upper half of the tunnels correspond to stars in four different constellations. Again, an interest in the archeological and mythical past informs the exquisitely detailed reconstructions of imaginary, or partly imaginary, cultures made by the Poiriers. *Ostia Antica* (1971–73) is an elaborate ten-yard long terracotta reconstruction in model form that is neither fiction nor reality.

During the same period, a number of younger women painters, not necessarily feminist, made significant contributions to the elaboration of mark and shape as expressive pictorial devices. The work of American artists Jennifer Bartlett and Dorothea Rockburne, and the Europeans Hanne Darboven and Edwina Leapman, grew out of a conceptually based non-gestural abstract language; that of Elizabeth Murray, Susan Rothenberg, Miriam Cahn, Pat Steir, Paula Rego, and Maggi Hambling was centered in figuration and the new Expressionism of the later 1970s. They combine research, discovery, and analysis in their approach to the formal issues of painting and their work refuses easy categorization within Modernist paradigms.

Around 1965 Darboven (b. 1941), a young German artist, began developing simple but flexible numerical systems. Recorded first in notebooks, the pages of which provided modules for larger

219 Hanne Darboven *24 Gesänge—B Form* 1970s



installations, the best known of her systems were based on day, month, year, century—the digits added and multiplied until they became unmanageable and were then broken down into progressively smaller areas which could in turn be re-expanded. Graphic records of process and time, the individual pages were combined into wall or room-sized installations.

216 Shortly after graduating from Yale in 1965, Bartlett (b. 1941) began to pursue chance as a way of selecting paint colors and steel plates for flat surfaces that would adhere to walls. In 1976, she completed *Rhapsody*, a large environmental painting made up of 988 square steel plates which took up approximately 154 feet of wall space. Described by the artist as “a conversation, where you start with a thought, bring in another idea to explain it, then drop it,” the work had a total of twelve themes, including four kinds of lines, three shapes, four archetypal images (mountain, house, tree, ocean) and twenty-five colors of the kind commonly found in plastic model kits.

217 Bartlett's interest in systematizing the marks, dots, and strokes that make up representation and her analysis of shape were shared by other artists. Elizabeth Murray's (b. 1940) formal vocabulary developed out of a collection of simplified shapes based on common household and studio objects. Their fragmentation, layering, and re-combination in daring compositions that are part sculpture, part painting shift the emphasis from figuration to abstraction, and from formal play to the conceptual framing of ideas. Pat Steir's (b. 1938) multi-panel paintings, a massive summing up of painting-about-painting, on the other hand, challenge cultural assumptions about artistic “individuality.” *The Breughel Series (A Vanitas of Styles)* (begun in 1981) is a two-part, eighty-panel work in which a still-life of flowers in a vase becomes a visual puzzle combining artistic styles from the High Renaissance to Abstract Expressionism. Assuming the “hands” of painters from Watteau to Pollock, Steir investigates the essence of style, theirs and hers. At the same time, other women continued to explore figurative and abstract pictorial languages that related more directly to the political goals of the Women's Movement.

Feminist Art in North America and Great Britain

Banding together around 1970 for the first time in modern history, women in North America and Great Britain gathered politically to protest their exclusion from male-dominated exhibitions and institutions. In New York, women artists and critics challenged the Museum of Modern Art and other New York art institutions, calling for continuous, non-juried exhibitions of women's work, more one-woman shows, a women artists' advisory board, and 50 percent inclusion of women in all museum exhibitions. In Southern California, the Los Angeles Council of Women Artists met in the Fall of 1970 to protest the exclusion of women artists from the important “Art and Technology” exhibition at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Pointing out that only one percent of work on display at the museum was by women, they demanded an “Educational Program for the Study of Women's Art.” The Los Angeles County Museum of Art responded with two important shows: “Four Los Angeles Artists” in 1972, and the monumental 1976 exhibition “Women Artists: 1550–1950,” organized by Linda Nochlin and Ann Sutherland Harris.

Around the same time, organizing efforts by British women artists paralleled those in the United States, but took place within a smaller professional art world and emphasized socialist politics rather than a politics of difference. The first Women's Liberation Art Group formed in London in 1970. The following year, it mounted its first exhibition at the Woodstock Gallery in London with works by Valerie Charlton, Ann Colsell, Sally Frazer, Alison Fell, Margaret Harrison, Liz Moore, Sheila Oliver, Monica Sjoo, and Rosalyn Smythe. Around the same time, the Woman's Workshop of the Artists' Union dedicated itself to combatting the isolation of women through collective creative action. In 1971, a display of Margaret Harrison's drawings became the first solo feminist exhibition in London, and was quickly closed down by the police because of “offensive” material, in this case a drawing of *Playboy's* founder and editor, Hugh Hefner, depicted as a “Bunny girl” with a “Bunny penis.”